



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER
ROGER BERLINER

March 23, 2010

A New White Flint

Today, the Council approved the White Flint Sector Plan by a unanimous vote. It is a plan that will transform the White Flint community – from the southern tip at White Flint Mall to the northern border at Montrose and Randolph Roads – into a more vibrant, walkable, bikeable, livable place.

I was excited about this plan from the very beginning, one that over many years will transform a significant portion of the Council District that I represent. Nonetheless, I was also well-aware that the compact, dense mixed-use development proposed represented a paradigm shift for our County, and especially for the neighborhoods adjacent to the sector plan. While many residents were excited by this vision of the future of their community, others were, and some remain, deeply skeptical and fearful of the changes that will occur.

For that reason, I made a commitment early on to protect the surrounding communities to the maximum extent possible and have worked hard to make sure that the new White Flint will improve the quality of life not just for the new people drawn to this vibrant place, but for those who already live in the immediate area. Our goal was to create a distinct "sense of place" for White Flint, and I believe the plan achieves that goal. Those who live in and around White Flint will be able to take advantage of the numerous public spaces, bike trails, and walking paths as well as the public amenities that make a neighborhood feel like a neighborhood – a library, a recreation center, a new school, and a beautiful, substantial civic green that will serve as a meeting place for the community.

Our vision for White Flint emanates from the growing understanding that we can no longer afford to perpetuate suburban sprawl. There is an environmental imperative for us to grow smarter, to grow more compactly and with less reliance on the automobile in order to reduce our carbon footprint. And I am excited about the

potential the White Flint Sector Plan has to achieve these goals. In fact, one of EPA's senior officials has praised the White Flint plan for that very reason. The new White Flint will allow people to live and play closer to where they work, to spend less time in their cars and more time enjoying recreational activities and time with family.

When you look at the area today, it is hard not be struck by the large amount of asphalt found in the strip malls and surface parking lots. Asphalt is not the highest and best use of this incredibly important real estate. We need less "impervious surfaces" and more trees. The White Flint Sector Plan will provide both. It will transform the proliferation of surface parking lots into a greener, more vibrant network of mixed use development that will produce vast improvements in stormwater management and overall water quality to the benefit of our local watersheds like Rock Creek. Streetscaping and street trees, along with other environmental incentives in the Commercial/Residential Zone (CR Zone) will also help to reduce CO2 emissions and absorb some of the heat produced in urban areas. In fact, it is the goal of the plan to double the tree canopy.

The White Flint Sector Plan is also predicated upon a deepening commitment to mass transit and calls for a new MARC station on Nicholson Court and the transformation of Rockville Pike into a lovely grand boulevard that will include state-of-the-art bus rapid transit. The plan calls for significant parking restrictions and aggressive mode share goals that will help take cars off the roads; a new street grid which should help diffuse traffic and make it easier to get around the area; and protective measures that will be put in place to prevent cut-through traffic into the neighborhoods surrounding White Flint.

My colleagues and I are committed to the proper implementation and careful monitoring of this sector plan. Throughout the course of the Council's deliberations regarding the plan, right up to and including today, I offered numerous amendments to ensure that our Planning Board keeps a close eye on traffic conditions that are the source of so much understandable consternation. Under an amendment I proposed today, the Planning Board will be required to do a comprehensive analysis of road conditions every two years, and to recommend to the Council specific projects that will uphold our obligation to provide adequate transportation services.

More broadly, I believe the new White Flint can and will serve as a model of sustainable growth for our county and perhaps for the nation as a whole. My goal has been to try to link what we are doing in White Flint to our need to take cars off the road around the new, enlarged National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, and launch Rockville Pike/Wisconsin Ave. as a pilot "Sustainable Transportation Corridor." We need to look at this corridor, arguably the single most important economic corridor in the state, in a holistic manner, not focusing too narrowly on one segment or a single neighborhood, but rather on the entire length of the Pike. And the state of the art

transit system that we envision for White Flint is as important to Friendship Heights and Bethesda as it is to Rockville.

While the redevelopment of the White Flint area will do much to create a new type of sustainable community, it will also benefit the County from an economic development perspective. It will be an attractive place for new businesses which will help sustain and enhance the County's vitality and competitiveness in the region. Significantly, the White Flint Sector Plan is expected to generate between six and seven billion dollars in new revenue for the County over the life of the plan – not a shabby figure in any economy, let alone our current one.

Arguably the most important aspect of the White Flint plan, given its scale and scope, is the degree of consensus that was reached, consensus reflected in our own Council's unanimous support. And this was not just a happy coincidence, but rather the result of years of ongoing collaboration between the private sector, neighbors, and government. Differing priorities and perspectives came together around a shared goal – to make the White Flint Sector Plan a strong, viable blueprint that will guide the successful transformation of the area for current and future generations of Montgomery County residents.

Roger Berliner
Councilmember, District 1